

JEROME RAYMOND'S NEW YEAR'S GIFT.

BY R. ANNIE FROST.

"A WOMAN to see me, Jane? Do you know who she was?"

"No, ma'am, she was never here before. She looked very much disappointed when I told her you were out, and said she would call again to-morrow at the same hour."

"No message?"

"No, ma'am. She said her business was very important, but she must see you, and could not leave any message."

"Take my cloak and hat to my room, Jane. I will lie down awhile on the lounge here; I am tired, and my head aches." But when the servant left the room, Helen Raymond did not lie down. The spirit of restlessness seemed to possess her, for she paced up and down the floor, pressing her hand upon her burning, aching forehead, and trying in vain to still her unquiet thoughts.

Two days ago, had you asked this young wife where perfect happiness could be found, she would have answered that it rested upon her own heart. One year before she had married the man she loved, believing her deep, pure affection was fully returned. Jerome Raymond was older than his gentle, beautiful wife by some fifteen years, but he was a man whose love might crown any woman's life with blessing. He was a merchant of high standing and ample means, and he had made it the study of this first year of wedded life to add by every means within his power to Helen's happiness. They had been abroad, and the girlish enthusiasm of the beautiful bride had stimulated the husband to many a ramble after the picturesque, many an hour spent in historical research, and many a long drive or ride over grounds filled with historic or artistic associations. Only one little week had they been in their own home, where taste and affection had dictated the expenditure of wealth, and where there seemed nothing wanting to make a true home of elegance, comfort, and happiness.

To say that Helen Raymond loved her husband with her whole heart gives no exaggerated idea of her affection. She had just been emancipated from school life when she met him, so noble, so true, and so good, respected in society, and standing high amongst merchants. Her father was his lawyer, and a troublesome lawsuit was in progress, requiring the client to call often upon his professional adviser. So the grave man of business met the fresh young girl with her unformed mind and untried heart, and he grew to love her, to look upon her sweet, innocent face with the feeling of delight one feels in contemplating some fresh mountain flower in a hot house. Jerome Raymond was no novice in the world's ways. More than one fair daughter—the full parapher-

nal of fashionable frippery had let him see that she would be willing to accept his name and wealth in exchange for as much of her heart as two or three seasons of flirting had left her. He had passed by so many of these, that the voice of society prophesied a life of celibacy for him.

But sweet Helen crept into his heart by no such portal as these had tried to force. She gave him at first the respect due to a man older than herself, and whom she believed far superior to all her other gentleman friends in intellect and moral worth, and he gave her the protecting fondness he would have accorded to a pretty child. How these emotions grew fuller and more perfect, till they stood upon the equal ground of strong, mutual love, it were too long a tale to record. It was an instance of true love whose course ran perfectly smooth. Relatives and friends on both sides were delighted, all agreeing as to the merits of bride and groom. Birth, social standing, wealth, all things in keeping, and love being added, there seemed nothing to cloud the sky matrimonial.

One year of married life had but united the two more closely; for, while Helen's character developed, her mind expanded, and her intellect fed upon stronger food than it had ever before received, she lost nothing of her sweetness of disposition or that gentleness and frankness that had first won her husband's heart.

And, now, pacing up and down the little sitting-room fitted up for her especial use, what is the bitter grief that clouds all the felicity of her life? Only a few words spoken in sleep. When Jerome Raymond, two mornings before, had kissed his wife's lips, and remarked upon their pallor, he had no idea what his own lips had betrayed in the still hours of the night. Only one sentence had escaped them, as he turned uneasily in his sleep, but that sentence had been like a dagger thrust to the heart of the wife who loved him so fervently. It was—

"Rosetta, my poor, deserted darling!"

Over and over again, in the two miserable days that followed, did Helen Raymond repeat the phrase. Who was Rosetta? Was she deserted for her sake? It was some one Jerome loved; the tender inflexions of his voice proved that. No relative of whom Helen had ever heard bore the singular name. Somewhere, she knew not where, there was a deserted Rosetta for whom her husband mourned. And, now, with this fact before her, Helen began to recall other facts of equal significance. She remembered hours of sadness passed by her husband, even in their honeymoon; there were letters, too, sent from abroad, whose address she was not allowed to see, and some received whose contents were not imparted to her. All had seemed right when she was happy and trustful, believing in her husband's love, but how dark it all looked now. And, while her heart was so torn and troubled, here was a

mysterious woman, who would not leave her name or errand, wishing to see her.

No wonder that her face was pale and haggard when she arose the next morning after a sleepless night, and her smile wan and feeble when her husband commented upon it.

"Indeed, I am quite well, Jerome," she said, as he pressed a loving kiss upon her face, and in her heart she wondered how he could be false to her, and feign such tender devotion.

And he, with clouded brow, was hurrying to his counting-house with his heart full of sorrow. "What ails Helen? Can she suspect anything? In three days to change like that. I will tell her all. But she is so jealous; she has told me often she hated a flower if I admired it too warmly. How would she bear to have me tell her of Rosetta? No, no, not yet. Later, perhaps, I will tell her all, but not now, not yet."

Yet it was evident that the secret oppressed him, deepening the furrows on his brow, and casting a shadow into the depths of his large black eyes. The day passed busily, for it was the last week of the year, and merchants all know there is little time to waste in that week.

While Jerome thrust back his sad thoughts to give his whole mind to business, Helen was striving to banish all unworthy suspicion from her own mind, trying to remember nothing but the love lavished upon herself, and the year of unalloyed happiness she had passed. She was in her little sitting-room with a dainty piece of embroidery in her hands, trying to interest herself in the intricate pattern, when Jane announced:—

"The woman, Mrs. Raymond, who was here yesterday."

Looking up, she saw standing in the doorway a tall, rather pleasant-faced Irishwoman, who held by the hand a little girl of about seven years of age. Looking at the child, Helen saw large black eyes, a pale complexion, delicate features, and a mouth of great sweetness, and sensitive almost to a fault. It was a lightning glance that took all this in, and the woman was invited to take a seat. She seemed terribly embarrassed, playing with the fringe of her shawl, adjusting the child's hat, and getting so red in the face that Helen really feared she would burst a bloodvessel.

"You wished to see me," she said, at last. "Can I be of any service to you?"

"Well, ma'am, if you will, you can serve me and do a good turn for your husband at the same time; but it's a queer errand I'm on, and I am afraid you won't hear me out."

"I do not understand you," Helen forced herself to say.

"I am afraid you will not listen to all I want to say. If you will promise, ma'am, to let me finish my story, I'll tell you how you can do a good turn for a husband who loves you."

"You have said that twice. Tell your story. I will hear you tell it all."

"Well, ma'am, and thank you, too; it's a long one, to be sure. It's little more than twelve years ago, ma'am, that I was cook in Mrs. Raymond's family—that's your husband's mother, ma'am—and she wanted a girl to run errands and tend the doer. I had a little slip of a sister, ma'am, only sixteen, and Mrs. Raymond took her for the work. She had been there about three months when Mr. Jerome came home from across the water, where he had been to finish his studies, they said. An only son he was, and his parents that proud of him that they nearly worshipped him, yet holding him in good control, too, and telling him sometimes of the great marriage he would make. Well, ma'am, we were all blind, his father and mother, and myself, her sister. I must tell you, she was very beautiful, my sister Rosetta."

Helen turned so white, that the woman paused, but she signed to her to go on.

"Well, ma'am, it was a good year before any one suspected what was going on, and then Rosetta ran away in the night. Nobody knew where she had gone, and I was turned away without any reason given for it. It was four years, and not a word came to me from my sister, when one day Mr. Jerome himself came to the service place where I was, and said to me:—

"Maria, come to Rosetta. She is very ill, and she wants you."

"So I left all and went to her. She was living in a pretty cottage just outside of the town, and I found her in bed, with a wee baby nestled up to her breast. She told me that she knew Jerome had made a mistake in taking her away; that he had tried to teach her and make a lady of her, but she could not learn. She was very happy, she said, and he had given her every kindness, but she was glad to die and leave him free to marry again."

"She was his wife?" said Helen, hoarsely.

The woman flushed angrily, and drew a paper from her bosom.

"There's the certificate, ma'am. I took it, and I took the child, when she died the next day. Mr. Raymond was good to her, and he has been good to the child; but she was not a fit wife for him. It was a very young man's love for a beautiful face, and when that died out there was nothing left. Still he was good to her. But now, ma'am, I'm wanting to go away. I've been married four years, and I've two children of my own, and my husband's got a good offer to go to California, only here's the child."

"Nobody living but me knows of my sister's marriage; and Mr. Raymond, I can see, cannot make up his mind to tell you. The little girl is old enough now to be put to school, but he shrinks from that, too, because he must own her in some way. Now, ma'am, you know the story."

"Is this the child?" asked Helen.

"Yes, ma'am. Rosetta, speak to the lady."

But the child only looked shyly at her, while Helen scanned her face and dress. In the latter there was every evidence of the generosity of her father, and no less of the vulgar taste of her aunt. Rich material, ill-assorted colors, and gaudy trimmings, marred the beautiful face, and took away from it the refinement Nature had placed there.

"Wait here!" She must be alone; she must think.

"She's dazed like," the woman said to herself, as Helen rose and left the room; and dazed like she felt as she shut herself in her bed-room and tried to compose her mind.

If he had only trusted her! If he had only told her why the shadow rested so often on his brow! She would gladly have given the child a place in her home and heart if her husband had asked her to do so. But it was so hard to have such a story told her by stranger lips, to have the closed secrets of his life opened by such rude hands.

The woman and child were very weary of waiting, when Helen came to them again.

"Leave the little girl with me until afternoon," she said, "and come again for her."

Maria looked earnestly into the pale, sweet face, and then rose, satisfied. "I will come at four o'clock, ma'am. Rosetta, stay with the lady."

The child obeyed, and was soon talking freely. She told of her dear papa, who had been away so long, but was at home again now; of the pretty presents he had given her, and of the beautiful lady she was to see some day if she was very good, and who would perhaps be her new mamma, if she was very, very good. As she prattled the bitterness was charmed away from the listener's heart, and a great pity for the father and child arose there. The old year was dying, and she resolved to bury away all jealousy and bitterness, and prove her love as unselfish as it was strong and deep. So when Maria came, she told her that soon there would be no obstacle to the California voyage.

It was New Year's morning, and a heavy storm was raging. The wind blew and the snow whirled through the streets, while even the most ardent followers of fashion shrugged their shoulders at the idea of New Year's calls.

The morning was somewhat advanced, and Jerome Raymond sat in his library alone. Helen, he supposed, was receiving any callers who might venture out in the storm. He had been almost provoked with Helen, she was so bright and gay. All the pallor of the past few days was gone from her face, and when she challenged his admiration for her rich new dress, and wished him a Happy New Year, there was an animation in her manner, and sparkle in her eyes, as if she was anxious to welcome her guests and begin the festivities of the day. And now, she was probably the cen-

tre of an admiring group of callers, whilst he sat alone in the midst of his perplexities. Twenty times he resolved to tell Helen of Rosetta, and as often shrank back from the task. No, he would keep his secret still, and put the child in a good boarding-school, for he fully realized that she was getting too old for her aunt's house to be any longer a suitable residence for her.

The hardest part of the business was that he really loved his little daughter. Even in the happy year spent abroad with Helen, he had missed the child, and his heart had gone out to her on his return, with a yearning, fatherly love. With a heavy sigh, he pushed away the book which he had been trying to read, and rested his head upon his hands, thinking, ever thinking, but resolving upon nothing.

There was a soft tap upon the door, but he did not heed it. Then it opened, and a little figure came in softly. Glossy curls of dark hair clustered round a pure white forehead, and a dress of soft white cashmere, trimmed with pure swan's-down draped the little figure; the little feet were cased in white kid boots, and the only ornament was a slender gold chain encircling the throat, and from which depended a golden heart. With footfall as noiseless as the falling of a snowflake, the little figure crossed the room, and two tiny hands fell upon Jerome's bowed head. "Papa!"

He started as if a shot had whizzed past him, and gazed wonderingly at the child.

"My new mamma sent me here to say that I am a New Year's gift to you with Helen's love."

"Who sent you here?" he asked, hoarsely.

"My new mamma. The beautiful lady with the blue silk dress. See, here she comes!"

He could only open his arms to her. Words would not come to thank her, but he held her fast in a close embrace, while tears, his manliness would not disown, filled his eyes. The child, too, crept into the embrace, and Helen drew her in between them.

So the New Year opened with no secret to close the loving hearts, and Rosetta found a true home and parents.

DEFER not charities till death. He who does so is rather liberal of another man's substance than his own.—*Stretch*.

GREAT vices are the proper objects of our detestation, smaller faults of our pity, but affectation appears to be the only true source of the ridiculous.—*Fielding*.

SPIRIT is now a very fashionable word. To act with spirit, to speak with spirit, means only to act rashly, and to talk indiscreetly. An able man shows his spirit by gentle words and resolute actions; he is neither hot nor timid.—*Chesterfield*.